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Aiding the Cuban Captives

CPYRGHT

THE KENNEDY administration is caught in a painful bind in the matter of the Cuban invasion prisoners held for ransom by Fidel Castro. Balanced against the "moral obligation" to rescue the men is the necessity to do nothing that will help Castro.

The government denies that it is involved in the ransom negotiations, but logic supports the opinions expressed in Congress and elsewhere that the talks with Castro have some degree of government sanction.

The quoted ransom price is \$60,000,000 or more, to be paid in food and medicines if the deal goes through. Friends and relatives of the prisoners have been raising funds, but it is highly unlikely private sources could raise such a sum as this.

Even if they could, delivering food and medicines of that value would require the approval if not the active co-operation of the government. Another significant fact is that the man involved in the mysterious negotiations with Castro is James B. Donovan. It was Donovan who arranged the deal to trade a Russian spy for the release of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers last winter. The Central Intelligence Agency was behind that trade, and the CIA was heavily involved in the Cuban affair.

But how can a government which is steadily tightening the screws on all commerce with Cuba have a hand in giving Castro \$60,000,000? The ransom attempt is in direct conflict with moves to hinder shipping between Cuba and its principal supplier, the Communist bloc.

Certainly, the humanitarian appeal is strong. The Cubans need food and medicine, and our quarrel is not with the Cuban people but with their Communist leaders. Most of all, the 1,113 prisoners taken at

the Bay of Pigs owe their plight to mistakes of judgment on the part of President Kennedy. We would think less of him if he felt no moral obligation to help them.

Distasteful as it may be to cater to the Cuban dictator's ransom plan, we do not see how the government can impose barriers to private efforts to obtain the release of the captives. The use of any government money, however, whether it comes from the CIA or some other agency, is something else again.

There is no easy answer and what appears to be happening is that the administration is seeking some middle ground—a way to help the prisoners without at the same time helping Castro. It will take some doing, because any official intervention in a ransom deal will put the government in the unenviable position of fighting Castro with one hand while feeding him with the other.

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